

Bar Council to discuss RM2.2b highway award to Umno men
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 10 — The Bar Council will deliberate next month concerns raised by its members today over allegations of “conflict of interest” in the RM2.2 billion highway contract awarded to firms linked to a former chief justice and an Umno lawyer.

Council president Lim Chee Wee said a number of members had contended during today’s annual general meeting (AGM) that the award could have been inappropriate, particularly if rumours that it was granted as a reward in exchange for Perak’s fall were proven true.

“The concern raised was whether it was appropriate, whether the retired CJ did benefit from this contract... whether or not the perception that (the award) might have been given by the government as reward was correct.

“Because one of the issues raised was that retired judges should not be given such substantial financial rewards by the executive,” he said.

Lim, however, stressed that the matter is still speculation and the council cannot offer its further opinion until more details are known.

“The incoming council will look into the matter further... I am not going to pre-empt the wisdom of the council (till) then,” he told a press conference here, adding that the next council meet will be held on April 7.

Opposition lawmakers have been railing against the lucrative RM2.2 billion contract for the construction of the 50km-long Kinrara-Damansara Expressway (Kidex) to companies owned by Umno lawyer Datuk Hafarizam Harun and the wife of former Chief Justice Tun Zaki Azmi.

The companies in question are Emrail Sdn Bhd and Zabima Engineering Sdn Bhd. Hafarizam is a director in both firms while Zaki’s wife, Toh Puan Nik Sazlina Mohd Zain, is a director in Emrail.

The issue was first broached by controversial blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin who raised the possibility that the lucrative contract could have been a reward to the duo for allegedly helping deliver Perak to the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

Lim noted today that “there is nothing to stop a lawyer from being a successful business person” but admitted that links tying Hafarizam, his directorship in the company and his role in the Perak crisis had caused concerns to be raised.

Perak fell to opposition hands during the tsunami of Election 2008 but was recaptured by BN during a yearlong constitutional impasse that ensued when three PR lawmakers left their parties to become BN-friendly independents.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin recently insisted that the Kidex contract

was awarded to only the most "qualified" companies and rubbished claims that it was due to political reasons.

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